

FARM BILL LISTENING SESSION

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Statement of

Daniel M. Dooley *

I am Daniel M. Dooley. I am here representing the University of California, California's Land Grant University, as Chair of the President's Advisory Commission on Agriculture and Natural Resources. By way of background, I also served as a member and Vice Chair of the USDA National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board for the first six years of its existence. I am a water lawyer from a long-time San Joaquin Valley farm family.

I thank you for making this trip to listen to the views of Californians about Federal farm policy. It is my hope that the comments you hear today, and from citizens across the country, will provide you with a helpful list of perspectives and ideas to guide USDA's participation in the development of a new Farm Bill.

I am going to speak today about the important role USDA plays in supporting science - and the extension of that science - to farmers, ranchers, and consumers. University of California President Robert Dynes refers to this continuum as "R, - D and D", research, - development AND delivery". He recognizes the critical importance of taking research discoveries from campus labs and getting these new technologies and the latest science-based information into the hands of growers and other stakeholders through Cooperative Extension.

Historically, this is something USDA has done extremely well in partnership with our nation's land-grant colleges and universities. Americans and Californians have been major beneficiaries of this partnership. You need look no further than the abundant farming operations around you in this county to appreciate that fact. You are surrounded

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by the early adopters of new technology who have used the products of the science development partnership to remain at the cutting edge of a very competitive global industry.

However, while it is easy to point to the past successes of the USDA's research mission ~~as a result of the partnership~~ and the partnership with land-grant universities and ARS, I am concerned that our national commitment to agricultural R-, D and D is not keeping pace with our need for science and innovation that can sustain a prosperous agricultural and rural economy. Speaking from first hand experience as a cotton farmer, I can tell you that the main reason my farm survives in a very competitive global marketplace is due to advancements in science and technology. R-, D and D is my competitive advantage, but it is an advantage that all of us in farming risk losing if government reduces its commitment to the public funding that will inspire the students and researchers of the future to pursue their curiosities in agricultural, food and nutrition science

As you know, in the 2002 Farm Bill, Congress called on the Secretary of Agriculture to appoint a task force to review the state of research within the USDA and to evaluate the merits of establishing a new institute dedicated to the disciplines important to the food and agricultural sciences. Among other things, the task force concluded that over the past twenty years, the research budget of the USDA has lagged far behind the research budgets of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), Department of Energy and NASA. It also found that only 8.5 percent of USDA research dollars are allocated through a merit-review competitive process. This compares with 85 percent of the NIH budget and approximately 90 percent of the NSF budget that is distributed through grants undergoing rigorous peer review and competition. The conclusions of these findings are clear: (1) We can – and should – be investing more in USDA research programs, and (2) we must commit to an approach to ensure that a much larger percentage of USDA research funds are supporting the very best scientific proposals.

To address these issues, the task force recommended the formation of a **National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA)** within the USDA. The Institute would report directly to the Secretary of Agriculture, but it would be kept separate and managed differently from existing programs so as to "develop its own culture and establish its own methods of operation." The Institute would be under the leadership of a top-level scientist. The model of comparison is the National Institutes of Health. The task force also recommended that the NIFA should only distribute grants using competitive merit review and the budget should grow in support over a five-year period to an eventual annual level of \$1 billion.

Speaking both as a farmer and as a member of the UC President's Agricultural Advisory Committee, I strongly encourage you to include some iteration of the NIFA concept in your Farm Bill proposal. I also suggest that you carefully consider how to best integrate existing partnership and intramural research and extension programs with the concept of NIFA. If we are going to continue to have the best agricultural systems in the world, we must recommit to having the best R-D and D systems in the world. Application of cutting edge science is one of the comparative advantages of U.S. agriculture, and key to our long-term competitiveness.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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